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1970

PREVIEW

EDWARD YOUNG, LL.D., DD.

(1683-1765)

Drawn and engraved by Holl. From the Frontispiece to the 1802 (4th) edition of *A True Estimate of Human Life*. Printed by G. Woodfall for H. D. Symonds, No. 20, Paternoster-Row.

PREVIEW

NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

EDWARD YOUNG'S

CONJECTURES ON ORIGINAL COMPOSITION (1759):

A CRITICAL EDITION

A DISSERTATION

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

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PREVIEW

CONTENTS

Index of Plates

Acknowledgments

Preface i

INTRODUCTION:

1. The Occasion for Publication vii

2. Young, Richardson, and the Process of Composition. . xxx

3. The Purpose and Design of the *Conjectures*:

The Substance and Structure of Young's Thought . . . lxiv

4. Young's Aesthetic Heritage cxxix

5. Young and the Critical Tradition: The Key Terms. . . clxvii

6. Conclusion: Addison, Young, and Augustanism. cci

7. A Note on the Text and its Presentation. ccxxxiii

THE TEXT OF EDWARD YOUNG'S CONJECTURES ON ORIGINAL COMPOSITION. . 1

APPENDIX:

Richardson's Letters on Young's Manuscript Drafts. 107

Schematic Outline of the Evolution of the Text 120

CHECK-LISTS

A Check-List of the First Editions of Edward Young's Works . 122

A Check-List of Works Cited in this Edition. 127

PREVIEW

INDEX OF PLATES

(Plates II-IV are preceded by a sheet discussing their relevance to the *Conjectures*.)

I Portrait of Edward Young by Holl . . . . . Frontispiece

II Frontispiece to the 1762-1767 editions of Young's *Works*. . . . . *post* lxiii

III Frontispiece to *The Centaur Not Fabulous* (1755). . *post* cxxviii

IV Frontispiece to the *Love of Fame* in the 1762-1767 editions of Young's *Works* . . . . . *post* cc

V Title Page of the First and Second Editions of the *Conjectures on Original Composition*. ccxlviii

VI Caption-Title Pages of the First and Second Editions of the *Conjectures on Original Composition*. ccxlix

PREVIEW

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Robert C. Tuttle was kind enough to make the plates for this edition. The plates of the caption title and title pages of the first and second edition are reproduced with the kind permission of the Keeper of Printed Books, the British Museum.

PREVIEW

Preface

"To the people who are living in it, the present seldom looks like the future." ——— B. H. Bronson

During a literary career that spanned almost half the eighteenth century, from 1713 to 1759, Edward Young distinguished himself as a dramatist second only to Addison and as Pope's forerunner in Augustan verse satire. His *Night Thoughts* (1742-1746) made him famous as the Christian moralist and "sublime" poet of his age both in England and on the Continent.[1] But if some students today may not agree with Samuel Johnson's closing statement in the *Life* of Young that he was "a man of genius and a poet," they must acknowledge that his last work, the *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759), holds an important position in the history of literary criticism. It is often anthologized, and has been frequently described by literary historians as an important document prefiguring the Romantic movement. It is not

[1]See particularly J. Barnstorff, *Young's Nachtgedanken und ihr Einfluss auf die Deutsche Litteratur* (Bamberg, 1895), and J. L. Kind, *Edward Young in Germany* (New York, 1906), and F. Baldensperger, "Young et ses Nuits en France," *Études d'Histoire Littéraire* (Paris, 1907).

PREVIEW

surprising, however, that scholars are still at odds concerning both the nature and the historical significance of this critical document. For amid the many perspicacious re-examinations of the period that have corrected so many Victorian shibboleths about it, and at a time when interest in Young has increased greatly,[2] no thorough examination has yet been made of what is today his most read and best remembered work.

Those few who have undertaken analyses of the *Conjectures* have operated on certain *a priori* assumptions resulting from what William K. Wimsatt, Jr. calls the "intentional fallacy."[3] They have assumed that the *Night Thoughts* was the work of a morbid visionary who attempted to mitigate the effects of personal tragedy by indulging himself in the therapy of grave-yard rhetoric. The appeal of the *Night Thoughts* to a later generation's yearning for gothic sublimity and for the mysteries of the extra-terrestrial[4] has led students to take an unguarded

PREVIEW

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[2]At this writing Henry Pettit's two volume edition of Young's correspondence is in production at The Clarendon Press, and Harry B. Forster's biography is now ready for publication.

[3]See "The Intentional Fallacy," written in collaboration with Monroe C. Beardsley in Wimsatt's *The Verbal Icon* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1958), pp. 3-18. The only analyses of the *Conjectures* to appear after its publication in 1759 are: Martin W. Steinke, *Edward Young's Conjectures on Original Composition in England and Germany* (New York, 1917), *Edward Young's Conjectures on Original Composition*, ed. Edith J. Morley (London, 1918), and Alan D. McKillop, "Richardson, Young, and the *Conjectures*," *MP*, XXII (1925), 391-404.

[4]Although there is no evidence that the *Conjectures* attracted the attention of the Romantic poets, there is much indication of their indebtedness to the imagery of the *Night Thoughts*. See Marjorie Bowen, "Edward Young," *Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature*, VIII (London: Oxford University Press, 1928), pp. 57-80.

approach to the *Conjectures* as the last work of a man whom they already believed to be imbued with the Romantic spirit. Thus, in their findings, they have almost automatically confirmed their expectations that the work was indeed what they felt it ought to be: an attack on the inhibiting prescriptivism of neo-classical dogma and a plea for sole reliance on that untutored, innate genius to which romanticists of all ages are drawn. However, this view of the *Conjectures* ignores much pertinent information concerning Young's involvement with the issues of his age, the views he consistently espoused regarding them, and the contents of the text itself.

The difficulty of assessing the position of any literary document within major historical movements is usually caused by the absence of information concerning it, or the necessity of passing it over because of overriding considerations of time and space. I believe our current understanding of both the nature and the significance of the *Conjectures* is both inadequate and misleading for these reasons. And since it is now read in most undergraduate and graduate courses that survey either eighteenth-century literature or the history of literary criticism, its audience is larger than ever before. Therefore, the need for a more comprehensive treatment of it is particularly compelling at this time.

If the reader detects any bias in the following study, I would hope that it is simply the result of my own negative response to the statements about the *Conjectures* that one ordinarily finds in studies of the period. It has been described as "the high-water mark of the worship of uniqueness and originality," inspired by a "mania for continuing original genius," and written because Young "petulantly

PREVIEW

revolted in his later years from the ideals and methods that had brought recognition to more favoured contemporaries." While certain passages taken out of the context of the work might well lead to its enshrinement in the pantheon of "pre-Romantic" documents, these passages do no more justice to Young's work than the cursory remarks just quoted do justice to the critical acumen of the scholars who made them.[5]

We should remember that Young began his publishing career in 1713, on the same day as his younger friend, Alexander Pope. As early as 1709, while still studying law at Oxford, Young had been captivated by the writings and personality of Joseph Addison. Although he was only ten years Addison's junior, he became a conscious disciple of Addison's literary philosophy, and began to concern himself with the ethical and theological implications of both the social and intellectual climate of early Georgian England. Most of Young's works were written in the decade following Addison's death in 1719, when he attempted with more than moderate success to emulate his predecessor's example as the literary conscience of society. Although Young became a popular literary figure who enjoyed his involvement in London life, the concern for the serious end and ultimate purpose of human existence, seen in the teleological emphasis of his earliest works, led him in his middle years to an abrupt change of career. At the age of forty-five he was

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[5]The sources for the quotations, in the order given, are: Meyer H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1953), p. 114; Wm. K. Wimsatt, *Literary Criticism: A Short History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1957), p. 327; and J. W. H. Atkins, *English Literary Criticism: 17th and 18th Centuries* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1951), p. 142.

PREVIEW

ordained an Anglican priest and two years later, in 1730, ceased to publish; he then retired to the small country parish of Welwyn for the remainder of his life.

Although Young's retirement from an active literary career occurred while Samuel Johnson was still an undergraduate at Oxford, his last three works did keep his name well before the public until his death thirty-five years later, in 1765. The *Night Thoughts*, *The Centaur Not Fabulous* (1755), and the *Conjectures* were all completed when Young was past sixty. And they were undertaken in response to what he considered as challenges to his long-held beliefs, written with the spirit of a man who had been raised to regard the reading and writing of serious literature as an extension of his Christian duty.[6] It is not likely, therefore, that the characterizations of the *Conjectures* we ordinarily encounter adequately describe a work written by a seventy-two year old Anglican cleric so ill as to be unable at times to hold a pen.

What follows, then, is only what I believe ought to fill an important gap in our understanding of the history of literary criticism. I have provided an edited text, with notes of explanation

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[6]That the *Night Thoughts* is primarily a well-reasoned (albeit overblown) defense of traditional Christian doctrine, which Young undertook in the face of a revival of agnosticism and scepticism, has long been established. Although it has been ignored by most commentators on the *Night Thoughts*, Isabell St. John Bliss' "Young's *Night Thoughts* in Relation to Contemporary Christian Apologetics," *PMLA*, XLIX (1934), 37-70 is an informed and detailed treatment of the theologically oriented structure and purpose of the poem.

PREVIEW

where necessary, and appropriate bibliographical data. The introduction deals in detail with all that we know concerning Young's reasons for writing the *Conjectures*, the critical tradition it reflects, the circumstances (both intellectual and personal) under which it was written, and the evolution of the text into its final form. I have also attempted to place the issues which Young raises, and the way in which he treats them, within the larger context of his other works and the more general perspective of the literary milieu in which he lived and wrote. The relationship of the *Conjectures* to major critical trends of its time may be inferred from the following introductory discussion and the explanatory notes to the text. Appropriate, annotated illustrations from eighteenth-century editions of Young's works are inserted at key points in the Introduction to vivify for the reader the major issues under discussion.

PREVIEW

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

PREVIEW

1. The Occasion for Publication

The identification of a particular cause which prompted Young to write the *Conjectures* is necessary in order to fully understand the meaning of the work. Why did Young undertake a discussion of such literary personalities as Pope and Swift and the events surrounding Addison's death more than twenty-five years after his association with them? When he began the work he was seventy-three years old, had been plagued for years with physical and familial problems, and had published relatively little during the decade following the last of the *Night Thoughts*.[1] Several arguments have so far been advanced to explain the appearance of Young's last work intended for publication, but none of them successfully account for either the rhetoric or the substance of the *Conjectures*.[2] More than thirty years ago, Alan D.

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[1]Only two original works appeared between the publication of *Night IX* in 1746 and the *Conjectures* in 1759: *The Centaur Not Fabulous: In Five Letters to a Friend, on the Life in Vogue* (1755) and a sermon, *An Argument, Drawn From the Circumstances of Christ's Death for the Truth of His Religion* (1758).

[2]H. W. O'Connor, in "Addison in Young's *Conjectures*," *MLN*, XXXV (1920), 24-26, argued that Thomas Tickell's death at Bath in 1740 prompted Young to discharge his debt to him for the story of Addison's death by arbitrarily tacking it on to the end of the *Conjectures*. O'Connor's

PREVIEW

McKillop published a general study of the work based on his interpretation of the correspondence between Samuel Richardson and Young from 1744 to 1759, but he did not deal with the reasons for the work's appearance.[3]

The answers to this, and to the question of Richardson's influence upon the final text, may be found, however, through a careful examination of the Richardson-Young correspondence and its relationship to the final text of the *Conjectures*.[4] Although the correspondence and the final text represent the only remaining evidence that sheds any light on these questions, it is possible to answer them with a reasonable degree of certainty. Approximately thirty of these letters deal specifically with the *Conjectures* and three of them contain extensive remarks by Richardson on Young's drafts, written during the

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thesis brought a comment in the same issue of *MLN* by J. W. Bright (58-62) that Young, whose concept of compositional unity he believed was greater than O'Connor supposed, had written the work because the approach of his own death called the death of his friend and mentor to mind. Bright characterized the work as having a "mixed style."

[3]Alan D. McKillop discovered "One Hundred and Fifty Original Letters...." by Young and Richardson, many of which were not included in Anna Laetitia Barbauld's *The Correspondence of Samuel Richardson*, 6 vols. (London, 1804), or in the six volume Forster manuscript collection of Richardsoniana in the South Kensington Museum. They were reprinted in volumes XXXVI-XLVII (1813-1819) of *The Monthly Magazine*. McKillop published his conclusions concerning the part Richardson played in the composition of the *Conjectures* and the evolution of the text generally in an influential article, "Richardson, Young, and the *Conjectures*," *MP*, XXII (1925), 319-404. All references to this correspondence are to *The Monthly Magazine* (*MM*), followed by volume, year, page, and day the letter was posted, if known.

[4]See Section 2 of the *Introduction* for the discussion of this question.

PREVIEW

three year period prior to the publication of the work in 1759.[5] Young's submission of the first of these drafts to Richardson in December, 1756, prompted a detailed reply from his respondent which (like two later replies) contained extensive quotations and particular suggestions for revision, all keyed to the pages of the lost manuscript of this early draft.[6]

Certain characteristics of Young's first draft emerge from a study of Richardson's letter concerning it. The clarity of these characteristics is enhanced by the fact that the "theoretical section" of the text (8.7-55.1 of the present edition) remained substantially the same from the first draft to the final text. The other three sections—the introduction on composition in general (1-8.6), the

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[5]None of Young's manuscripts pertaining to the work survive, and I am grateful to Henry Pettit, editor of Young's correspondence, for informing me that *The Monthly Magazine* contains all the evidence available for the years under discussion here. For the provenance of this collection, see McKillop, "...*Conjectures*," 391. An account of their editing by Richardson and others appears in *Selected Letters of Samuel Richardson*, ed. John Carroll (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1964), pp. 3-10. See also Henry Pettit, "The Text of Young's Letters to Samuel Richardson," *MLN*, LVII (1942), 668-670. The results of editorialization by interested parties and errors in printing in *The Monthly Magazine* collection of the correspondence have been compensated for by the present editor.

[6]Richardson's three major letters, on the first and third drafts, are reproduced in their entirety in the *Appendix* below. For the importance of the relationship between the "two parts" of the third draft in establishing the copy text of this edition, see Section 7 below. The term "theoretical section" is used here (and subsequently without quotation marks) to denote that section of the *Conjectures* in which Young develops his theories on literature in general.

PREVIEW

application of Young's theory to modern authors (55.2-91.18), and the closing eulogy, on Addison and the end or purpose of human achievement (91.20-end)—varied considerably throughout the three year period of composition, as we shall see.[7] But the theoretical heart of the work, as reflected in Richardson's letters and in the text, varies only slightly, and only as a result of minor stylistic revisions or the re-location of certain passages within the section itself. Although the theoretical section should not ultimately be considered in isolation from the other sections of the work, an examination of Young's consistent approach to the issues he deals with there provides a clear-cut answer to the question of his motives for undertaking the epistle. And an examination of the revisions which the other three sections of the work underwent will subsequently show how, and why Young altered them to reinforce his original intentions.

The occasion for the *Conjectures* must be placed some time before the first mention of it in the correspondence, which appears in a letter Young sent to Richardson accompanying the first draft on December 21, 1756, stating "I know not the merit or demerit of what I send; if it has merit I beg you give it more.... When you read it

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[7]Numbers in parentheses within the text of the *Introduction* refer to pages and lines of the text of the present edition. A detailed examination of the process of revision is made in Section 2 of the *Introduction*, below.

PREVIEW

favour me with a line...."[8] That Young would send his printer and close friend a manuscript without prior warning is attested to by Richardson's brief letter acknowledging receipt of it; and such a request was not out of keeping with the relationship between the two men.[9] Young had most recently sent him the manuscript of *The Centaur Not Fabulous* (1755) under similar circumstances while Richardson in turn had sought the advice of Young (among others) during the writing of *Clarissa* and *Sir Charles Grandison*.[10] Because of the distractions of the holiday season, however, it was over three weeks before Richardson was able to communicate his thoughts on the manuscript.[11] During this interval Young was still developing his ideas, although he had sent Richardson his only copy of the manuscript. He wrote

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[8] *MM*, XLII (1816), 41.

[9] The correspondence of 1752-1759 indicates a very close personal relationship, involving frequent mutual visits and interdependence between Young and Richardson due partially to their increasing physical infirmities.

[10] *MM*, XL (1816), 135 ff. July 14, 1754: "I have a thing I would send immediately to the press; its about the length of five sermons; and, as I am distant from town, it can go but slowly. I would fain show it you before I put it out of my hands; I put it in my pocket for that purpose, when I called at your door." For the part Young and Richardson's other literary friends played as a sounding board during the writing of his two novels see Alan D. McKillop, *Samuel Richardson, Printer and Novelist* (New York: The Shoe String Press, 1960), Chs. II and III.

[11] Both Young at Welwyn and Richardson in Salisbury Court entertained house guests during the Christmas season. Thomas Edwards, author of *The Canons of Criticism* which Richardson had printed in 1748, stayed with Richardson during an illness he experienced that winter (*MM*, XLII [1816], 41).

PREVIEW

Richardson several times expressing his desire for a quick reply, allowing however that "the longer the papers are in your hands the kinder and the better."[12]

Richardson's detailed comments, contained in his letter of January 14, 1757, give a general but adequate picture of the first version of the *Conjectures*.[13] It began with an extended complimentary dedication to the author of *Sir Charles Grandison*, at whose request Young states he was prompted to write on the subjects of original and moral composition. These subjects are to be considered because many works have recently come from the press which lack these qualities. Young therefore recommends that the press be restrained in some fashion from issuing such works on the grounds that they do not benefit mankind, and because there is ample opportunity for greater works to appear in the present age. In pages three through eighteen of the manuscript Young sets out to prove the superiority of original and moral works by contrasting them with imitations in terms of the higher nature of their source and the greater efficacy of their result. Having asserted their superiority, Young moves on to argue for the possibility of their appearing in the present age. In this discussion,

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[12]The quotation is from the last of these letters, *MM*, XLII (1816), 332, dated January 13, 1757, which must have crossed Richardson's extensive reply in the post. The other letters Young wrote while waiting for it are in the same volume, pp. 41-42.

[13]The following reconstruction is based on the contents of Richardson's letter augmented by portions of the published text where the similarities in substance and structure of both justify the combination.

PREVIEW

undertaken within the usual context of the ancients-versus-the moderns controversy, Young emphasizes that it is the union of intellectual genius and moral worth that accounts for the achievements of great writers in all ages. These endowments Young ascribes to the beneficence of God: they are His on-going gift to man continually bestowed on him in every age, just as God's nurture of physical nature causes its periodic rejuvenation. Because man is under a moral and intellectual injunction to partake in God's overall design for continued creation in the world, Young warns against the evil consequences of the suppression of man's genius through his temptation toward slavish imitation. Young catalogues the causes of imitation and its ill effects, demonstrating again at the close of this section that these causes are not necessary ones, due to the external nature of things, and that their hindrance may be removed through man's exercise of self-knowledge and self-reverence.

The burden of Young's argument in the theoretical section rests on the following syllogism: since the union of intellectual originality and moral superiority in the personalities of great men results in the production of great works, and since these God-given endowments, while they may vary from individual to individual, are generally constant from age to age, it follows that works of original genius may even appear in cultural environments usually believed to be inimical to their production. To demonstrate the truth of this assertion Young examines, in the original draft of the section on modern authors, the "Serious Drama" of those who were generally regarded as living in an environment detrimental to original genius.

PREVIEW

He interprets the term "Serious Drama" in its loosest generic sense, at times extending his discussion to serious works which lie outside the traditional generic hierarchy of the tragedy, epic, ode, and lyric poetry. He begins by comparing Pope's *Essay on Man* to Milton's *Paradise Lost*, concluding that Pope is actually equal to Milton in both the originality of his intellect and the sublimity of his achievement. He goes on to demonstrate the cause and effect relationship between great men and great works through a brief discussion of Dryden's *Ode* followed by an extended discussion of Addison's *Cato*, and a general encomium on Bacon and Shakespeare. The closing section of the original draft, on the end or purpose of life (which occupies the last three pages of this manuscript according to Richardson's letter), is consistent with the purpose of the whole. In it Young states that it is man's love of worldly fame that causes him to imitate slavishly the achievements of his predecessors, while he ought to be more aware of the ultimate purpose of his own existence, which is to fulfill the promise of the particular talents entrusted to him by God.

Most of the details and the general purpose of Young's first draft may be attributed to one specific cause: the appearance of the first edition of Joseph Warton's *Essay on the Writings and Genius of Pope*,[14] published anonymously in the spring of 1756 and dedicated

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[14]The second edition, revised in two volumes, appeared in 1782, seventeen years after Young's death with a change in the title to ...*Genius and Writings*.... All references are to the first edition, London, 1756.

PREVIEW

"To the Reverend Dr. Young, Rector of Welwyn, in Hertfordshire."[15] Since the *Conjectures* represents Young's attack on those fundamental assumptions about literature that guided Warton in his *Essay*, an analysis of it will reveal the context for Young's arguments as they appear in the *Conjectures*.

Warton's first assumption was the typically Augustan view that poetry should be evaluated according to its position within an established hierarchy of genres that ranked tragedy as the highest form, followed in descending order of merit by the epic, the ode, and the lyric. The corollary to this assumption was that the higher an author rose on this scale in his choice of manner of representation the greater were the opportunities for the display of the sublimity and pathos which Longinus and his eighteenth-century disciples felt were the marks of true poetry. Thus in the introduction to his *Essay* Warton distinguishes four kinds of poetry: (1), genuine poetry which is sublime, pathetic, and original; (2), moral poetry which is the poetry of reason; (3), descriptive poetry which reflects familiar life; and finally (4), the poetry of mere versifiers. In assigning

PREVIEW

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[15]Warton, like Young, pursued both a literary and an ecclesiastical career. He may have dedicated the *Essay* to Young out of admiration for some of his poetry and because he felt the older cleric might advance his career in the Church. See J. Kinsley, "The Publication of Warton's *Essay on Pope*," *MLR*, XLIV (1949), 91-93 for the history of Warton's attempt to secure ecclesiastical preferment through Young. Young may also have been personally offended by Warton's assessment of his own poetry in the introduction: "Your epistles on men and women and satires make you a man of wit and sense, but not a poet on their account" (*Essay*, vi).

modern poets to the two highest ranks—Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton are sublime and original poets, while Dryden, Pope, and Addison are moral poets—Warton was simply echoing the judgments that others of the age had made before him, differing only slightly in the specific terminology he used.[16] Warton also reflects the Longinian influence upon the Augustan age in his tendency to apply generic principles more liberally than the classicists from which the scheme was inherited, by giving more weight to the matter represented than the rules for its manner of representation.[17]

This principle accounts for Warton's definitions of the generic ranks, and his assignment of particular poets to them as well as the many examples of great literary achievements he cites from the prose works of Addison, Richardson, and others. In assigning Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton to the first rank of poets and in his derogatory discussion of Addison's *Cato*, Warton's concern with grandeur of subject over its manner of representation is particularly evident.[18] This concern is most obvious in his comparisons between

PREVIEW

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[16]Paul F. Leedy, in "Genres Criticism and the Significance of Warton's *Essay on Pope*," *JEGP*, XLV (1946), 140-146, cites several eighteenth-century antecedents for Warton's classification of genres and the particular authors he assigned to them.

[17]For the effect of Longinian influence on generic theory see Norman Maclean, "From Action to Image: Theories of the Lyric in the Eighteenth Century," in *Critics and Criticism*, ed. R. S. Crane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), pp. 408-462.

[18]In his edition of Pope's *Works* (1751), which was the occasion for Warton's *Essay*, Bishop Warburton had stressed Pope's originality in

Pope and other authors, where the contrasts Warton draws between Pope's poetry and his prose portraits of Addison and Richardson are particularly disadvantageous to Pope.[19] When Warton said: "The sublime and the pathetic are the two chief nerves of all poesy. What is there very sublime or very pathetic in Pope"[20] he was setting up a paper tiger that could easily be blown down by the fairly rigid application of his own interpretation of outmoded Augustan generic precepts.

Warton's real purpose, under the guise of re-evaluating Pope's achievement on the occasion of Warburton's edition of his *Works*,[21]

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matter as well as manner of representation in an attempt to vindicate his relationship with Bolingbroke and the merits of *An Essay on Man*. He carried the point with Warton on this work, but not on the others.

[19]For a detailed account of the attitudes of Edwards, Warburton, Warton, and others connected with Richardson and Young on Pope see W. L. MacDonald, *Pope and His Critics: A Study in Eighteenth-Century Personalities* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1951).

[20]*Essay*, p. x.

[21]That Warburton was aware of Young's reply to Warton's *Essay* is clear from a letter Richardson wrote on May 25, 1759: "Dr. Warburton commends highly the spirit of the piece; and, with a few small observations and explanations, subscribes to the merit of the whole" (*MM*, XLVII [1819], 135). His principal reservations were communicated to Young by Richardson a few days later, on May 29th. "One of Dr. Warburton's remarks was that the character of an original writer is not confined to subject, but extends to manner: by this distinction, I presume, securing his friend Pope's originality. But he mentioned this with so much good humour, that I should have been glad to have heard you both in conference upon the subject" (*MM*, XLVII [1819], 136-317). By this date Young had changed his mind, deciding not to rank Pope as an original, but as an imitator. In his undated reply to Richardson's letter he states that "*Manner* (as Dr. W. says,) may be *original*; but a *manner* different from that of the ancients, with good judges, will run

PREVIEW